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ABSTRACT

One of a series, this guide was produced for parents who want to become involved in their children's education and is designed to help them understand and encourage adolescents' growth and development. Section I offers an overview of adolescence. Section II discusses aspects of self-esteem, qualities of relationships affecting self-esteem, and improving low self-esteem. Section III describes developmental tasks of adolescents. Section IV differentiates parental encouragement and pressure, and section V discusses aspects of peer relationships and peer pressure. Discipline is the topic of section VI. Sections VII, VIII, and IX, respectively, explore ways of helping the adolescent toward responsibility, fostering a positive attitude toward school and learning, and helping with homework. Section X suggests ways of helping the adolescent having problems at school. Career planning is discussed in section XI. (RH)

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LEARNING IS A FAMILY AFFAIR : A Guide for Parents of Children in Grades 7 - 12

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THANKS

Learning Is a Family Affair: A Guide for Parents of Children in Grades 7 - 12 was produced by the Maine Department of Educational and Cultural Services for parents who want to become involved in their children's education. It is designed to help parents understand and encourage their adolescents' growth and development. For more information, contact your local school or the Department of Educational and Cultural Services.

This Guide is part of a three-volume series accompanying seven public service announcements broadcast by Maine's commercial television stations in the fall of 1984. Other volumes in the series are: Learning Is a Family Affair: A Guide for Parents of Students in Grades 1-6 and Learning Is a Family Affair: A Guide for Parents of Young Children. This project was inspired by Deputy Associate Commissioner of Education Caroline Sturtevant, and owes special thanks to her and to Linda McGuire, Charlene Preble, Brud Maxcy, Jim Abbott, and Joseph Pecoraro for their help and encouragement over many months. Most of all, the project owes its success to Charlotte Sawtelle and Cheri Allen, who contributed far more than any of us expected them to.

Gloria LaChance
Project Coordinator

INTRODUCTION

This booklet is for parents who wish not just to survive their children's adolescent years but to use this time to get to know their growing children and to enjoy them during this part of their lives.

The writer's goal is to provide some understanding of what adolescents are going through, of their feelings about themselves, and of the tasks they must perform during this time. Also included are tips on what we, as parents, can do to make this period easier and more pleasant for them and for ourselves.

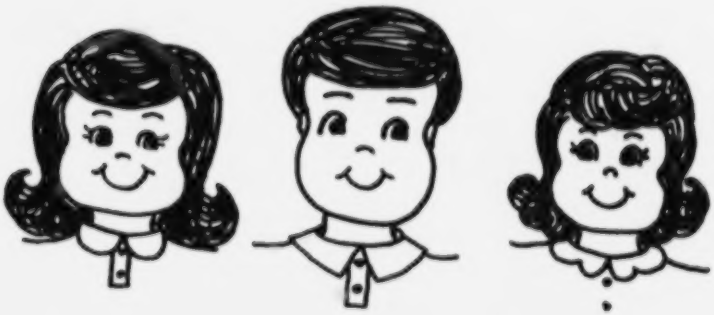
Many parents are anxious about their children's adolescent years, which certainly can be a trying time. The aim of this booklet is to help prevent that turmoil.

If you wish to read additional material on the adolescent years, there is a wealth of information available in the books listed at the end of this booklet.

Charlotte Sawtelle

ADOLESCENCE: AN OVERVIEW

"Trouble, fears, and turmoil" are words often used to describe the teenage years. The negative aspects of adolescence are so publicized in our society that many parents approach this period in their children's lives with actual dread. It would help us, the parents of adolescents, if the media would accentuate the positive aspects, tell us about the teenagers, and their parents, who use this time to strengthen relationships and to erect the bases for successful lives.



Who Are Adolescents?

Adolescents are people between the ages of twelve and 22 years (we will concentrate on ages 12 through 18). The key word here is people. Too often our society categorizes all teenagers as troublemakers; however, most are sincere, concerned young people who are trying to do their best, are looking forward to their futures, are learning to cope with changing relationships, and are needing and wanting respect, acceptance, and guidance from parents, peers, and society.

Many people feel that adolescence is a temporary time, one just to be survived, and that it isn't important. It is of intense importance to adolescents, however. A great deal happens during this period that will affect their growth and success throughout their lives.

Another common misconception is that all adolescents are alike. Parents of more than one child and teachers of junior and senior high school students know that the differences among teenagers are as great as the differences among people of any other age group. The same is true of the so-called generation gap. Some young people have trouble relating to an older generation; many others do not.

Adolescents do not all mature at the same rate. A fourteen-year-old boy who is six feet tall may be socially and emotionally way behind another boy of his age who is five feet three. A physically early-maturing girl may still be collecting dolls or reading children's books. These examples make one wonder why we seem automatically to expect more in all areas from children who mature physically before many of their age-mates.

The Early Adolescent

The early adolescent is a young person between the ages of approximately twelve and fifteen. Generally, this group includes children in the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. During this short period of time, many significant physical and social changes take place. Often, these changes and their consequences are confusing to young adolescents and to us, their parents. The more we all know about what to expect and about what is normal, the better equipped we will be to deal effectively with these changes and with any resultant concerns that may arise.

Physical Development and Its Effects

The development of physical maturity occurs almost entirely during early adolescence. Young people see dramatic changes taking place in their bodies. These changes have a tremendous effect on how adolescents see themselves, on their self-esteem, and on their performance in school.

The timing of physical development also is important. In our society, early-maturing boys enjoy a distinct advantage, while early maturation is a disadvantage for girls.

Boys who mature early often are given more leadership roles, excel in athletic ability, are more popular, and are seen as more attractive by adults and by peers than are late-maturing boys. This continues into late adolescence. In comparison to boys who mature early, late-maturing boys tend to experience more problems in their personal and social adjustments during this period.

On the other hand, girls who mature early often feel left out and even odd, as most of their classmates have not matured. They may become submissive and lack poise in social situations and seldom are seen as being admired or as being leaders. Late-maturing girls tend to be more outgoing and assured during early adolescence than their early-maturing age-mates. In late adolescence, many become confident, poised leaders.

In addition to the timing of maturation, young adolescents are concerned about what is happening to them, and why, and about how other people are reacting to them. A prime concern is, "Am I normal?" We can help our children immensely by providing them with an understanding of what is going on, about what is normal, and about what will be happening before the process of becoming an adult is completed.

The word normal, in this case, as in other stages of development, covers a wide area. Just as we don't expect all children to walk, talk or produce new teeth at the same ages, we also do not expect them to mature physically at the same ages.

If you become concerned about your child's development, a physical check-up for your child and a short conversation between you and the doctor following the exam will lessen your concern or alert you to a problem that might exist.

New Expectations and Their Effects

While young adolescents are adjusting to the physical changes that are occurring, they also must cope with changes in what is expected of them. The adults in their lives, especially parents and teachers, are coming up with whole new sets of expectations.

The adjustment to junior high school is difficult for many young adolescents. In theory, the junior high school was designed to ease the transition from a self-contained classroom with one teacher to the typical high school schedule which includes a different teacher and classroom for each subject area. Many junior high schools, however, adopt the general patterns of high schools. The transition, rather than being eased, is made more intense, as it comes earlier in a young person's life. Expectations of academic performance often increase sharply at this time, also, even though the intellectual development of the young adolescent isn't adequate to meet the demands.

To complicate matters, the young person's social life is expanding. In many school systems, sixth-graders from several elementary schools are brought together to form the seventh grade at a junior high school. This means a lot of new faces and a lot of new adjustments to make.

As our children enter junior high school, we often complicate the many adjustments they already need to make by treating them differently than we

did before and by setting new standards for their behavior -- now that they are "adolescents." It is at this time that we parents, in our quest to bring out the best in our youngsters, are apt to make them feel that we really don't accept them the way they are. Of course they must accept increasing responsibility, and of course they must "grow up," but these changes don't and can't occur overnight as they enter grade seven. Our expecting them to will serve only to make our children feel that they are failing us, that they aren't living up to our expectations. When this occurs, they may rebel or may just plain give up.

Another problem befalling early adolescents is that some parents begin to expect problems, especially with peers and peer pressure. It is true that young adolescents are beginning the normal process of separation from their parents. This means that they are working toward the time when they can make it on their own. It does not mean that they stop caring about us, even though during this period they may see us as less heroic than before. During this time, also, brothers and sisters are particularly annoying. It's all part of the process.

Young adolescents crave group acceptance even more than they did from ages six through twelve. Fourteen-year old David may pretend that he doesn't know the answers when his teacher calls on him in class. Why? He wants to be one of the boys, and being too smart isn't accepted by his crowd. With the insecurity that is common during this time of change, the young adolescent needs large doses of confirmation from friends.

Parents of junior high schoolers often are perplexed and troubled by the behavior of their children. Peace and calm at home seem to have ended, and problems seem to appear from out of the blue. Typically, the troubles begin toward the end of grade six, continue through grade seven, reach their peak during grade eight, and begin to taper off in grade nine. As Eric W. Johnson writes, in his book, How to Live Through Junior High School [8], "There is no more puzzled parent than the parent of an eighth grader."

Do we have to watch helplessly as our young adolescents struggle through this stage of their lives? Fortunately, we don't. There are many ways in which we can help them through this time. We will explore some of these in this booklet.

SELF-ESTEEM

As caring parents, we want our children to be self-confident, happy, and successful.

Every aspect of the lives of our adolescents is linked to their feelings of self-esteem. Dorothy Corkill Briggs, in her book, Your Child's Self-esteem [4], describes self-esteem as "the mainspring that slates every child for success or failure as a human being." Its importance cannot be over-emphasized.

What Is Self-esteem?

Self-esteem is how people feel about themselves -- how much they like who they are.

The fortunate adolescents with high self esteem enjoy a feeling of self-worth, a calm sense of self-respect. They don't feel a need to impress others, as they already know they have value. This knowledge influences positively and directly how they function in all areas of their lives.

Adolescents with low self-esteem are unhappy with who they are. They feel that they have little of value to offer, that they are inadequate. All of their perceptions and all of their actions are affected by the negative view they have of themselves.

The effects of low self-esteem do not begin or end with adolescence. Very young children act out their dissatisfaction with themselves or simply give up and withdraw. Our prisons and mental institutions are filled with adults who suffer from the effects of low self-esteem.

All people need to feel that they are loveable and worthwhile. We all have these needs, and they will stay with us for the rest of our lives.

Helping Your Adolescent toward High Self-esteem

We can't be around our adolescents every minute in order to protect them from people who would criticize them and otherwise deal blows to their self-esteem. No one travels through life with only positive experiences. As parents, we can help to make the positives far outweigh the negatives, however. Adolescents whose basis for self-respect and self-confidence is secure are able to withstand negative reactions from others and still come out on top. That secure base begins at home.

There are several ingredients needed to build that base.

o Nuturing love - This entails tender caring. It means that we value our adolescents just because they exist. Our acceptance of them isn't based on their performance or on their meeting our expectations. Their need for this kind of love from us begins when they are tiny and continues indefinitely.

It isn't enough that we just feel this way; we have to be sure that our young people know that we do.

How can we show them?

o Direct involvement - All children, no matter what their ages, need times when our attention is focused only on them. It's an important way of showing them that we care, that being with them is important to us.

This kind of focused time might be a walk with your teenager during which you talk over events of the day. It might occur on a fishing trip or a shopping trip, just for the two of you. One mother and her son talked for just a few minutes each night before he went to sleep. This sharing time began when he was young and continued through his teen years and led to a caring, open relationship -- a huge reward for only a few minutes of time each day.

Certainly, young people don't need this type of involvement constantly, but the more, the better, especially when they're under stress. When there has been a big upheaval, as a divorce or a move; a big disappointment, as the failure to make an important team; or the death or illness of someone close to them, adolescents really benefit from extra doses of "I'm - all - here - for - you" time.

o Trust - This is the basis of an adolescent's safety. At all ages, our children need to know that they can trust us.

o Honesty - This is the most important ingredient in a nuturing relationship. It is very important that we be open with our children. Children of all ages are confused when we say one thing, and our unspoken clues say another.

When Margaret comes home from school, her mother is cranky and out of sorts. When Margaret asks what is wrong, her mother answers, "Nothing."

At this point, knowing that something is upsetting her mother, Margaret may feel that she is at fault, or that her mother isn't glad to see her.

What if we have a problem that we'd rather not share with our sons or daughters? Does being honest with them mean that we have to tell them everything? Not at all. We might just say that we're worried about a problem that we'd rather not discuss. Then our words and actions would match. Had Margaret's mother done that, Margaret's confusion, and hurt, could have been avoided.

Most of us were taught to conceal our strong feelings, especially anger. From infancy on, we were made to feel guilty for expressing anger. "Nice people don't tell their brothers that they hate them. You love your brother." "You must be tired and upset. That's why you were so unkind to your sister." Anger is out -- taboo.

Although this is changing, men and boys often are expected to hide disappointment, tenderness, and sorrow, as well as anger. To do otherwise demonstrates weakness.

The truth is, we do have all of these feelings, whether we show them or not, and they all are normal. It takes strength, not weakness, to bring feelings out into the open and deal with them. If we, as parents, share our feelings, our children won't have to hide theirs. Some of the unhappiest young people come from homes where feelings are kept under lock and key.

o Praise - Many parents feel that all honest praise is helpful to children. It is supposed to build self-esteem. If that is true, why do we still have so many insecure children, under-achievers, and dropouts, even though they have been praised?

Praise, unlike flattery, is sincere, yet certain kinds of praise may cause discomfort, guilt, and even misbehavior.

Have you ever watched teenagers react to praise such as the following? "You're so smart." "You've done a wonderful job." "You are a great writer." Common responses are, "I'm not really all that good." "Flattery will get you nowhere." "I was just lucky."

These reactions reflect discomfort rather than confidence. Teenagers have trouble coping with this type of praise. Why do they react in this way? They are being judged, and that is uncomfortable.

Haim Ginott [5] states, "Praise that evaluates personality or character is unpleasant, unsafe. Praise that describes efforts, accomplishments, and feelings is helpful and safe."

It is embarrassing for adolescents to hear that they are wonderful, or terrific, or whatever. They feel that they have to deny it. How could they agree, publicly, with their parent or teacher that they are wonderful? "Thank-you, Miss White. I agree that I am wonderful." Never!

When we praise, we must consider our teenagers' reactions as well as our words. The following are a few of Dr. Ginott's examples of helpful and unhelpful praise and the inferences that teenagers make:

Helpful praise: Thank you for the birthday card. I could not stop laughing, it was so funny.

Possible inference: I chose well. I can rely on my choices. I have good taste.

(Unhelpful praise: You are always so considerate.)

Helpful praise: I appreciate greatly your babysitting. It saved my day. Thank you so much.

Possible inference: I can be helpful. My efforts are appreciated. I'm pretty nice, sometimes.

(Unhelpful praise: I can always rely on your thoughtfulness. You are a wonderful girl.)

Helpful praise: I like your essay. It gave me several new ideas.

Possible inference: I can be original.

(Unhelpful praise: You are a good writer. Of course, your spelling needs improvement.)

Helpful praise: I appreciate your washing the dishes tonight. There were so many of them and I was so exhausted.

Possible inference: I can be helpful. I'm appreciated.

(Unhelpful praise: You are a wonderful dishwasher.)

Praise that makes adolescents feel appreciated, liked, and capable helps them toward high self-esteem.

o Criticism - In our efforts to guide our teenagers, we may overuse criticism as a teaching method. Most parental criticism is unnecessary, and most is unhelpful. As Dr. Ginott [5] points out, when we take a wrong turn in the road and lose our way, the last thing we need is criticism. It isn't helpful to have someone analyze and evaluate our driving skills at that point. It isn't helpful to be asked:

"Didn't you see the signs?"
"Can't you read?"
"Why don't you think before you turn?"

What we need is a friendly person who will give us clear directions.

Our drowning teenager doesn't need criticism, a lecture on how to swim or an, "I told you that you should have taken lessons last summer." He or she needs HELP.

Criticism, when it is used, does not have to be harmful. When is criticism helpful, and when is it destructive? Constructive criticism doesn't cast blame or judge the person. It simply tells adolescents how we are reacting to their behavior.

Destructive criticism makes negative judgments and is threatening. Often, it involves sarcasm and ridicule, both of which have no place in conversations between parents and teenagers. The results often are hatred and counterattacks.

The following examples given by Dr. Ginott [5] point out differences between unhelpful and helpful criticism.

Destructive criticism

When Theodore, age sixteen inadvertently spilled paint on the rug, his parents became enraged.

MOTHER: How many times have I told you to be careful with paint? You always make a mess of things.

FATHER: (with disgust): He can't help it. He's sloppy! He always was and always will be!

There is no doubt that the cost of the ridicule far exceeded the cost of the paint. How does one price loss of confidence? It is best to clean up the paint, without measuring the personality.

Constructive criticism

When Fay, age fifteen, spilled glue on the carpet, Mother called out: "Oh, the glue is spilled. Get a rag and some water." Mother helped Fay clean up the mess while saying, "The glue is so messy. It's hard to get it off the carpet." Fay answered, "I'm sorry, Mom. I should have been more careful."

Fay's mother dealt effectively with the situation. She didn't attack her daughter. She tackled the problem. Mother was tempted to warn about "next time", but when she saw how grateful her daughter was, she restrained herself. In the past, the cry over spilled glue would have spoiled the mood for the entire day.

Many of us were on the receiving end of insults and ridicule when we were growing up, and much as we disliked them, we may find ourselves repeating them, word for word, to our children. We can learn to communicate without these; the benefits to our relationships with our teenagers will be well worth all of our efforts.

Criticism and self-esteem

Teenagers already are extremely self-critical. They need our support, not our criticism. Our negative comments about their character and personality serve only to lower their self-esteem.

Adolescents tend to believe what their parents say about them. If they're told repeatedly that they are stupid or slow, they may stop trying in school, hoping, by avoiding the issue, to escape ridicule and failure. "I can't fail if I don't try." Teenagers who are told over and over that they are clumsy may give up sports because they are convinced that they never can become good at them.

"You" messages and "I" messages

We can send messages to our adolescents without damaging their self-esteem. Generally, "you" statements describing a person are judgmental and negative. "I", when followed by what we are feeling, sends a kinder message.

The following are examples of the two types of messages:

"You"	"I"
"You're such a slob!"	"I don't like having to clean up after you."
"You're always so loud. Can't you ever do anything without all of that noise?"	"I can't work when it's this noisy."

Changing from "You" to "I" messages is difficult to do, but the positive results are dramatic.

o Empathy - Empathy is true understanding of another. It is almost as if a person moves right inside someone else and knows just how that person feels. To show empathy is to understand without judging.

It is difficult to achieve total empathy, and no one can empathize with another person all of the time. When we can, however, it means a great deal to our children, especially to our teenagers, who often feel that no one understands them.

Empathy is real proof of caring. "Mom may not agree with me, but she cares enough to make the effort to understand how I feel. She respects my point of view." When adolescents consistently feel misunderstood, they stop talking. In homes of children with high self-esteem, usually one finds a great deal of relaxed conversation. Empathy lets these young people feel safe to express their feelings and opinions, and it virtually wipes out loneliness. "Dad understands." "Mom knows how I feel."

How can we let our teenagers know that we understand? We can watch for words and actions that show how they feel. Also, we can draw on our own past experiences. We can try to remember how we felt when we didn't make the team, or when the big history test came back with an F on it, or when our best friend moved to another state.

When our teenager comes dragging home after a similar experience, we could say, "These things happen to everyone. Don't worry. You'll get over it." Statements such as these put us into the position of being know-it alls, and we may even be right, but we certainly haven't made our teenagers feel any better. At that moment, they don't want to know how everyone else feels. They're hurting, and they need to know that we understand how <u>they</u> feel.

We can phrase our statements to show that we're "with" them.

"You seem very disappointed." "It must really have hurt your feelings." "You are furious with that teacher right now."

When feelings are high, understanding can help to lessen the sting. Many a day has been saved by empathy.

<u>If my teenager's self-esteem is low, can this be changed?</u>

Yes, it can. Every person has an amazing capacity to bounce back and to grow. Counselors often find that just one hour of "positive" time each week for a year or two can help a child (or adult) to change his or her self-image. Think what we, as parents, can do in the time we spend with our children!

If you think that your adolescents may be suffering from low self-esteem, you can start now by providing them with positive experiences with people and with life; with acceptance, even though they are not living up to your expectations; and with success for their efforts.

Parents who shift to providing a nuturing environment often are amazed at the positive changes which occur in a fairly short time, even though the shift may not be made until their children are teenagers.

Often, even with no change in the home environment, children with low self-esteem make significant strides toward a better self-image through their contacts with teachers, relatives, or friends who offer a nurturing climate.

An ideal situation is when both occur -- when children receive acceptance and support from family and from people outside the home.

This short excerpt from Helen Bottel's book, Parents' Survival Kit [2] describes one such reversal. She received this letter from twelve-year old Melissa:

> Dear Helen: Kids make fun of me. I sit in study hall because no one will eat lunch with me. I'm overweight and ugly, and I don't have one friend. School is horrible. I get knots in my stomach just thinking about it and the kids I have to face.
>
> I took a handful of aspirins hoping I'd die, but I only got sick, and I didn't tell anybody 'cause I was ashamed.

My folks are okay but they're very busy. I try not to bother them. What can I do?

-----Melissa

Melissa and I corresponded over the years. In every way possible I tried to build her self-esteem -- and I found an active ally in her mother (who only seemed "too busy" to a withdrawn girl).

Mostly, Mel needed nurturing. When she discovered we cared a lot, she blossomed. (And breaking the age-thirteen barrier helped also). She lost her baby fat, learned to dress and use make-up well, and developed her talents (at my suggestion she volunteered for the school newspaper and became a by-line reporter with a teen column in the metropolitian daily). Every step forward brought more assurance that she could take another step.

My last letter from Melissa put me up there in the clouds:

Dear Helen: Guess what? I was elected school secretary..on my 16th birthday I had a party and everybody came...best of all, I've got the greatest boyfriend and he really likes me. (And much, much more).

environment for your child may not always go smoothly, and there may be setbacks, but the change in your adolescent is worth all of the effort that you will put into it.

Don't feel that you have to do this alone. There is help at your child's school or at your church or synagogue. If additional help is required, and it sometimes is, your child's guidance counselor, teachers, or principal will refer you to someone who can provide it. Again, you are not alone. There are people who can help you.

TASKS OF ADOLESCENCE

Young people, on their journey from childhood to adulthood, have a lot to accomplish. It is valuable for us, their parents, to be aware of their tasks so that we can help our sons and daughters, or at least not get in their way.

It may be that what we see as big problems are just normal steps in a young person's development. Knowing this, we can relax, and, more importantly, we can allow our children to relax.

Barbara Varenhorst, in Adolescent Peer Pressure [10], outlines six tasks of adolescence. A shortened version is included here to help us better understand what our children are living through.

1. Experiencing physical sexual maturity. This is a major and universal task. For most adolescents, the years from twelve to sixteen are the most eventful years of their lives, as far as growth and development are concerned. As young people watch changes occur, they may be pleased or horrified, depending on the timing and on the extent of their development. The realization that they have something in common with all human beings causes a new assessment of the world around them and affects their relationships with peers and adults.

2. Developing one's individuality. "Who am I? What do my social experiences and relationships mean to me?" As young people answer these questions, their interests, preferences, and personalities begin to unfold, and their self-concept is solidified and tested. A sensitive, fragile task, it leads the way to preparing to make a commitment to the future.

3. Forming Commitments. As they move toward adulthood, adolescents need to learn how to get along with others and how to contribute to the world around them. They do this by meeting various kinds of people, seeing other cultures, and taking part in some aspects of the adult world of work. They need to experiment with their strengths and weaknesses and to participate as citizens, as responsible members of society. Because we still view adolescents as children, we give them few opportunities to do this. We need to allow them to experiment without suffering disastrous results and, at the same time, to be held responsible for their actions. This requires a fine line of judgment and guidance from adults, which often is difficult to provide.

4. Separation and autonomy. The task of becoming separate from parents is difficult for young people who are trying out their wings and often distressing for parents who may feel a loss of prestige and control. As adolescents move toward their peers and away from the home for their opinions, styles, authorities, and values, we often misread the signals and overlook the fact that they still need limits set by us, as well as our continuing support. They are practicing to one day be on their own, but it's a gradual process and a sometimes scary one. During this time, the peer group is a lifeline for adolescents - but adults also are lifelines. Adults must not oppose or compete with the peer group. Cutting

off either of these critical relationships, peer or adult, can cause severe consequences.

5. Outgrowing types of egocentrism. There are two main types of egocentrism common to adolescents. The first, typical of junior high school students, is the feeling that they are always on stage - always being noticed and judged. This is less true among high school students.

The second is a type of loneliness. This is expressed by the feeling, "I am alone. No one understands me or is like me." Part of this includes a sense of immortality and a feeling that "nothing bad will happen to me. I will not die in a car accident. I will not become pregnant or addicted."

As adults, we need to help young people to see the importance of looking outward as well as inward - to help them to see themselves in relation to others.

6. Re-evaluating values. We learn, and we formulate values throughout our lives; however, the major work is done during adolescence. During this time, youth gradually become able to form independent moral judgments. They also use their new skill to question adult values. As scary, and irritating, as this often is for adults, it is normal and is necessary for human development. In

order to do this, young people need a stable set of values against which to test their emerging personal values. If our values are inconsistent, their job becomes more difficult. If adult values are vague or contradictory, young people will rely even more heavily than they otherwise would on peers who are as confused and immature as they are. Some of the most serious problems adolescents face today, such as teenage pregnancy and drug abuse, can be traced to this confusion.

Young people need consistent guidelines if they are to develop a solid base for their personal value systems.

How can we help?

We can help our adolescents with these tasks of growth by:

1. listening - really listening - to their feelings and opinions;

2. not making them feel guilty about the tasks they must accomplish - especially their need to move away from us;

3. respecting their privacy - not reading their mail, listening in on their telephone calls, going through their bureau drawers, or asking for detailed descriptions of their dates. By providing privacy, we demonstrate respect. We may feel that we can help our teenagers more if we know what's taking place in their lives than if we're left out; however, when we pry, our sons and daughters feel betrayed. In our quest to better understand our teenagers, we actually have moved toward cutting off communication and creating resentment;

4. keeping our home, and ourselves, attractive. Many teenagers are very sensitive to their friends' reactions to their parents. Neat-appearing parents, vacuumed rugs, and made beds can save our adolescents a great deal of embarrassment. An added bonus is that they want to bring their friends home;

5. supporting our teens in their activities and keeping supervision to a realistic minimum (more under discipline) and in the background, as much as possible, when their friends are around;

6. holding on to our sense of humor. It really helps during this time;

7. not losing sight of the long-range view. Even though our teenager's road may seem a little rocky, now, most adolescents grow up to be responsible, stable adults;

8. providing opportunities for our teenagers to be successful, to achieve recognition for their efforts, and to feel good about themselves;

9. talking with younger brothers and sisters to help them to understand the family teenager's needs;

10. giving our adolescents a safe, caring environment in which they can thrive.

ENCOURAGEMENT AND PRESSURE

Encouragement and pressure - Our encouragement and support are important to our teenagers. It is critical, however, that encouragement doesn't become pressure, that we not base our acceptance of them on their ability to earn straight A's, or to equal a parent's athletic achievements, or to play the violin. We may think that the "best" thing for our teenagers is to graduate from the college we attended, or to take over the automobile dealership that we've worked so many years to cultivate, or to become the first person in the family to graduate from college, or to make All-State Band or Chorus. The problem is, what we want may not be what our children want. They are separate people, not part of us. What would make us happy might make them miserable.

While we dream of Dartmouth for our teenager, he or she may be wanting to attend a vocational school. While we're thinking of marriage and motherhood as the ideal for our daughter, she may want a career - maybe no marriage, or, at least, no children. Our potential automobile dealership owner may want to be an electrical engineer. The child we see as a violin soloist may hate the violin.

Another example of pressure is when a child cannot live up to the expectations of parents. Just because Mr. Jones and Grandfather Jones and Great-Grandfather Jones went to Harvard and became doctors, or lawyers, or whatever, does not mean that Randy Jones has the ability to do that, even if he'd like to.

The results of pressure are truly sad to witness. Some young people give up; some rebel; some try and try, only to fail. All are frustrated.

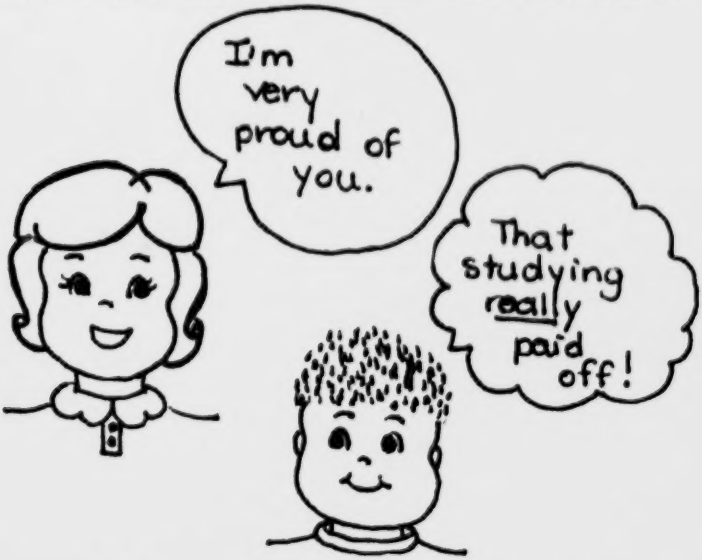
Underachievers most frequently come from homes where there is constant pressure to do more and better. Through their own words and their actions, the parents are telling their children, "We have little faith in you. You aren't measuring up."

Michael was judged by his parents in accordance with his success in school. Grades and test scores below a B threw him for a loop. He was extremely tense when taking a test, as if it were a matter of life and death. He really believed that his personal worth was graded with each paper. His tension actually prevented him from learning and from thinking clearly.

Michael's parents may have thought they were encouraging their son to succeed in school. In truth, they were exerting pressure, and that pressure actually was detrimental to their son's success.

Cheating is another result of pressure - high grades at any cost. In some families, when a score of 96 is brought home, the first comment is, "What did you miss?"

Encouragement is different. We rejoice with our teenagers over the 96 points they earned rather than dwell on the four that they missed.



We offer them the opportunity to play the instrument of their choice, and we appreciate their progress. We support them in the activities that are important to them.

o Setting reasonable expectations - In order that our adolescents will be able to live up to our expectations, we need to make a special effort to keep those expectations reasonable.

It is important for young people to have goals. We can help by encouraging, not pressuring, them to strive for goals that are important to them and by accepting our children as worthwhile, whether or not they live up to our expectations.

When setting goals, sample questions that we might ask ourselves include:

Is it important to me or to my child that he or she follow in my footsteps as a star athlete?

Why do I want my teenager to attend the college that I attended?

Why do I want popularity and lots of dates for my teenager? Maybe I wanted to be in the center of things, to have an active social life. Maybe my son or daughter is happiest with a small, comfortable group of friends who share his or her interests.

Am I pushing for more family activities when my teenager wants and needs to move toward his or her peer group?

While earning all A's is an admirable goal, is it a goal that my son or daughter is <u>able</u> to achieve?

Is it for my child's benefit or for mine that I'm insisting that he or she be enrolled in "track I" academic classes, even though past performance and test scores indicate that an average track is a more reasonable placement?

Not all young people are "straight A" students. Are we so busy pushing for this for our children that we ignore <u>their</u> needs? Are we so intent on this one aspect of our teenagers that we may be ignoring skills or talents that they <u>do</u> possess? Are we pushing our young artists to be doctors or our young carpenters to be accountants?

It is painful to watch young people struggle to live up to unattainable or unwanted goals that are set and even demanded by their parents. Let's communicate with our adolescents, find out what they want for themselves, and support them as they strive to meet their goals.

PEERS AND PEER PRESSURE

During adolescence, the need to conform is so central that when teenagers appear completely indifferent to group opinion, they may be hiding feelings of being shut out. Overwhelming conformity suggests undue insecurity. Young people who have high self-esteem can stand up to some group pressures. These secure adolescents often become leaders.

Generally, after two or four years of being glued to group values, adolescents begin to shed, first in one way, then in another, their group dependence. Somewhere between the ages of seventeen and twenty, they should be confident enough to stand apart, to trust themselves to handle responsibility, to know that they don't need constant support from outside.

Popularity

We should not urge our children to seek popularity. Pressure from parents to have lots of dates and phone calls from friends, accompanied by

worried looks and disappointment when they aren't forthcoming, only add to insecurity. Rather than encouraging our teenagers to be "nice" in order to attract friends, we should teach them to have faith in their own values and feelings, to have the courage to stand alone when necessary. Young people need such courage to go against the crowd in refusing a drink, or a cigarette, or a dare.

Their life and their safety may at times depend on their being able to be unpopular. Haim Ginott, in Between Parent and Teenager [5], states, "Our message to our children should be: 'We value integrity more than popularity. We put personal decency above social success.'"

As an example, he describes Jane, age thirteen, who gave a slumber party to which she invited ten girls. Having been told that many of the girls wouldn't attend if one of Jane's friends came to the party, Jane was upset and ready to give in. Her parents objected, making it clear that a friend is not to be discarded because of pressure. Father said: "In our home, loyalty to a friend takes precedence over popularity."

A dramatic stand on values makes a strong impression on our teenagers. They may not like our words, but they respect our strength and value our integrity.

Selecting friends

First of all, not every child wants or needs to be at the center of a large group of friends. While some young people enjoy lots of social contacts, others are perfectly willing to have friends if they want to come around, but they are too engrossed in their interests to put too much effort into developing a lot of friendships. Perhaps they will have one or two friends who share their activities, but that will be all. If

such adolescents seem happy for the most part, we will do well just to enjoy them and to support them.

How about the adolescent who has few or no friends, who wants them, and who is miserable? While there is no easy answer, these suggestions might prove helpful. The first thing a parent might do is to contact a favorite teacher or a guidance counselor at school. They might have suggestions, and once alerted to the problem, might be able to help in subtle ways. For example, seats can be changed or projects set up that will involve partnerships. In some high schools, there are peer counselors who are trained to help out in this and other situations.

At home, we can be encouraging and supportive - never nagging our teenagers to get out there and make friends. We can see to it that our homes are inviting places for young people. Possibly, we can arrange a special project or trip - a fishing trip, a ball game, a shopping trip, a good play or movie, a trip to the beach or the mountains - and let our sons and daughters invite a classmate to go along. We should welcome any friends who turn up and not be critical of them. We can be sure that our teenager knows that our house is available and that they can have anyone stay overnight.

Another possibility is to explore groups where young people might develop friendships. These might include a hobby group, scouts, or a church or other youth group. We must remember that as much as we may want to, we can't make friends for our children; however, we can help to set up favorable situations.

If none of these suggestions works, and your child is very unhappy for a long period, it might be well to seek help from a counselor. If you do not know where help is available in your community, a guidance counselor, principal, or teacher at school may be able to give you a list of possible sources of help.

A nice thing to keep in mind is that once your son or daughter experiences success in making one or two friends, other friends are likely to follow.

The level of our adolescents' self-esteem is reflected in their choice of friends. They may select undesirable friends because they feel they don't deserve "nice" ones, or their friends may act the way they would like to act but don't dare.

Rather than criticizing their friends (this almost always is resented by adolescents and can lead to even stronger relationships with these friends than before, plus rebellion in other areas) and refusing to let them see them (very difficult to enforce), it is important for us to deal with our teenagers' needs. Again, outside help is available if we have trouble working on this alone.

DISCIPLINE

The word "discipline" means different things to different people. To some, the word discipline implies punishment. To others, it means training or teaching. In this booklet, discipline will mean training.

There are three general approaches to discipline:

o The authoritarian approach - In this method, an authority figure makes the decisions and hands down the rules. Problems arise because young people have no voice concerning what happens to them. Many children, adolescents in particular, rebel against this form of discipline. Behavior becomes worse and worse instead of better and better. As children become older and more resistant to being told what to do, the rebellion worsens. Some children give in and behave because they fear punishment. Others learn to lie and sneak in order to avoid punishment. While the authoritarian approach is sometimes effective in stopping a behavior right now, it generally creates anger and resentment and fails in the long run.

With very young children, who are in the presence of their parents most of the time, this approach may appear to work. As children move into their teen years and are more often away from their parents, this holding-under-the-thumb approach becomes less and less effective.

o The over-permissive approach - This approach hands the authority to the child. Adults sit back and watch. They results usually are disastrous. Children from over-permissive homes generally have a very hard time with the limits set by their schools and by society. Often, they are confused and scared. Children, including adolescents, are not ready to take complete responsibility for their behavior. Who will stop them if they lose control? Worse still, they aren't ready to have control over adults. The over-permissive approach is even less effective and more harmful than the authoritarian approach.

o The democratic approach - This approach takes into account the child's self-esteem. Here, adults and young people work together to set limits that are acceptable to all family members. Of course, even adolescents can't have a say in every instance. They must attend school, for example, and they must not physically assault another person just because they feel like it. In many instances, though, they do have a voice, and, because they do, they are much less likely to rebel against rules in general. Some parents have a hard time with this approach because it means giving up some of their authority. Generally, however, once they have tried it for a while and have seen that it saves them time and reduces friction within the family, they are sold on it.

Being a parent is not easy. It may be the most difficult job in our society. Each stage of our children's growing up years brings with it new challenges for them and for us. The period known as adolescence is no exception. Does this mean that family dissension during this time is unavoidable, that the whole family must be in a period of upheaval? No. By employing guidance,

sensible limits, and a lot of understanding, we can be among the hundreds of thousands of families who move through this period with skill and assurance.

The saying, "Accentuate the positive," deserves the seat of honor in all of our dealings with our adolescents, including discipline. We should try to spend more time encouraging and praising the good we see than in discouraging and punishing the bad.

Parents who look for the worst from their teenagers often get just what they expect. Children of all ages tend to live up, or down, to what their parents expect of them. How sad it is when parents dwell on the negative. They're missing some of their best years with their children - time to really get to know and to enjoy them.

Setting Limits

Do we need to set limits? Yes! We live in social groups. Some rules are necessary to protect the interests and the safety of others. If everyone just paid attention to his or her own needs and whims, we'd be in a real mess.

We can set limits and make corrections, however, without damaging self-esteem. In fact, we can present and enforce rules in ways that will enhance self-esteem and that will invite cooperation from our teenagers.

o "I" messages

First, we can use the "I" messages that we discussed earlier.

Instead of, "Turn down that stereo! Your taste in music is awful," we might say:

"I can't concentrate with the stereo playing so loudly.

Instead of, "Stop tapping that pencil. Can't you ever sit still? Some part of you always has to be moving," we might say:

"I'm having trouble reading with that pencil tapping."

"I" statements do not put our teenagers on the defensive. They don't insult or put down. They don't initiate arguments. They simply state how the behavior is affecting us, and, by not issuing direct orders, they allow our adolescents to save face, to change the behavior because they want to, not because they have to. The stereo might remain on "high" for a few more seconds, and the pencil may tap a few more times. It's unrealistic to expect instant compliance from adolescents. They need to show their independence - to stop the behavior because it's their idea rather than because we ordered them to.

The result is that we have peace and quiet and a happy teenager.

o Respect

Adolescents want very much to appear grown up. In our approach to discipline, we can set limits in a manner that preserves our teenager's self-respect. Our limits are based on values and are aimed at building character.

Dr. Haim Ginott [5] stresses that it is important to distinguish between feelings and acts. We respect our teenagers' wishes and feelings, their attitudes and opinions; however, we reserve the right to stop and to redirect some of their acts.

When we set limits, we take our children's feelings into account. We try not to embarrass

them by correcting them in front of their or our friends. If correcting needs to be done, we can take them aside, quietly.

Getting teenagers, especially senior high school students, to call home when they are going to be late can be a real hassle. One parent tells of saying to his daughter, "Please let me also have a good time rather than a worried one while you are out. When you are going to be late, call." And, parents, please return the favor in kind. We show that we care about our children's well-being by asking them to call us. We also show that we care by calling them when we are going to be late - again, respect for their feelings. The same holds true when we ask them to let us know where they will be in case we need them. They might need us, too!

o Increasing say in setting limits

As children grow older, they can and should have an increasing say in limits that are set. For example, adolescents and their parents can work together to set mutually agreeable curfews. They can discuss how often and under what circumstances the older teenager may use the family car. They can discuss when group and single dating may begin.

When limits are set that are acceptable to all family members, rebellion and resentment are kept to a minimum. An added bonus is that these rules are more likely to be followed than are those that are handed down arbitrarily.

o Reactions that fit

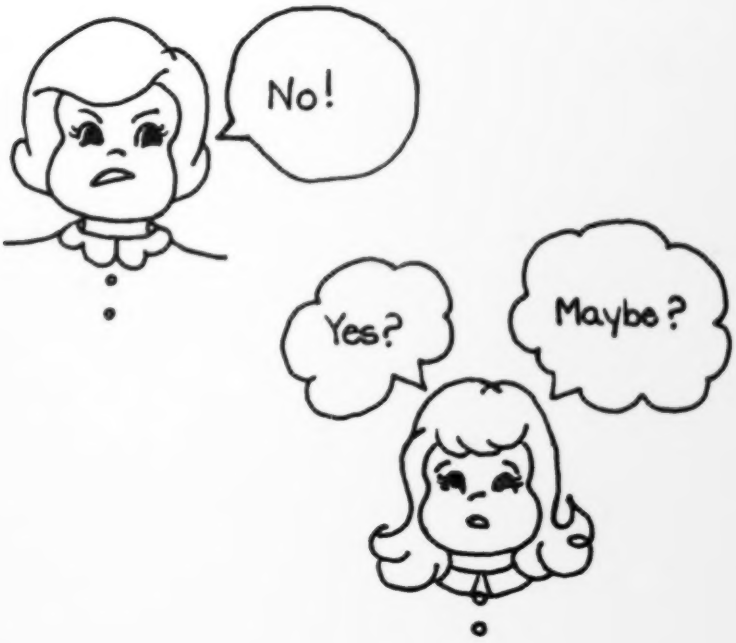
Adolescents need to learn from their parents to tell the difference between events that are merely irritating and those which are serious.

When we blow up over such irritations as hair styles, time-wasting, clothing choices, and spilled glue, it's as if we're using a sledge hammer to pound in a tack. It can lead to

confused children, and to sneaking and even lying in order to avoid our wrath. Almost certainly, it leads to a shut-down of any real communication that might have taken place. Counselors and teachers often hear the phrase, "I can't tell my parents. They'd have a fit." We all would do well to listen to our adolescents and not to overreact. The benefits to us and to our children are tremendous.

Consistency

If a certain behavior is off limits-today, it should be off-limits every day, except under exceptional circumstances, such as when a child is under a great deal of stress. It can't change just because Mom or Dad is tired and doesn't want to bother to enforce it. Adolescents, as well as younger children, are confused when limits bounce around. They need consistency.



The same holds true when we deny a request. If our daughter wants an expensive new dress, and we say, "There is no money for a dress today," we stay with our answer. If our no's mean maybe, or even yes, we are headed for trouble. The same rule applies when we say, "Yes," and then don't follow through. How can we hope to teach our children to be dependable if we are not?

Report cards present a real challenge to parents in the follow-through department. A classic scene occurs when Mary brings home a "terrible" report card. Her parents become really upset, and a big fight ensues, with lots of yelling and crying. They ground Mary, take away her TV-watching privileges and set up a three hour per night study schedule. After two or three weeks, Mom and Dad, busy with their own thoughts and activities, forget about the "new" rules, and everything returns to normal - until the next report card comes home.

When a child fails in school, there is a reason. An F on a report card usually indicates that, for whatever reason, a child is not trying or is seriously misplaced in school. It is not the time to criticize or to assign blame. It's time for help. It is time for periodic parent-teacher conferences, for setting up a realistic study schedule, for a great deal of encouragement (not pressure), and for a lot of follow-through.

Inconsistency lessens our adolescents' willingness to take us seriously. "Not to worry - I can get Mom (Dad) to change her (his) mind." We're not doormats, we're parents.

Consistency between parents also is critical. When children can manipulate parents, play one against the other, the family is in for trouble. A "no" from Mom turns into a "yes" from Dad and vice versa. This becomes a great game for some children and is often also the cause of many family arguments. If you're a two-parent family, talk with each other about what's important where your children are concerned, and then present a united front.

Parental anger

Children make parents angry. When this happens, we need to remember that it's okay for us to be angry and that we're entitled to express what we feel provided that we don't attack our child's personality or character.

It's better to say, "I'm angry," or, "I'm furious," and to explain why than to lash out at a child in fury and violence. Lashing out is unacceptable and has no place in our dealings with children.

There are ways to deal with our anger without hurting our children and without causing resentment. Dr. Ginott [5] suggests that we must learn a new language that will allow us to do this and that, at the same time, will help us to gain greater control over ourselves. He suggests that describing what we see, what we feel, and what needs to be done. We do not attack the person.

The following are examples of this method:

George, age fourteen, entertained friends in the livingroom. They left without cleaning up. When he returned, his mother said, "When I see soda bottles, cards, and potato chips all over the floor, it makes me feel unpleasant inside. It actually makes me angry. The room needs to be

cleaned up after playing." "O.K., Mom. I got the message," George protested, as he began to clean up the mess.

Jo, age fifteen, promised to be home from a school dance before midnight. She returned at 2:00 a.m. Her parents were frantic. They expressed their anger, concern, and disappointment in no uncertain terms -- without calling Jo names, attacking her personality, or insulting her.

"We were worried sick when you didn't show up on time. You can't imagine what crossed our minds. We're so furious; we're all upset. When you say you'll be home at midnight, we expect you at twelve o'clock. It's unfair to put us in such a position. When you see that you are going to be late, call us. We have such mixed emotions, now. We're relieved that you are safe but very angry that you were so late."

Some parents find it helpful to express their anger in writing. The following is an excerpt from a letter from Jane's mother:

Dear Jane,

I'm writing to you because when I try to talk to you about this, I lose my temper and don't get my message across.

I want to ask that your bedroom door be kept closed at all times, as the condition of your room is not pleasant. I was particularly upset to see your clothes strewn about on the floor. Clothing deserves care and looks better when it isn't wrinkled and dirty. The apple cores, etc., that are in your waste basket are causing an odor that is distasteful. Please respond in writing.

Love,
Mom

It isn't easy to change habitual ways of expressing anger. Realizing that you need to and want to is a big step. It may help to review an unpleasant situation and think about what "I should have said." When the situation comes up again, try a new approach. Work hard to leave out insults.

We're all human, and we all make mistakes. We won't have the energy to use the new approach all of the time; however, as we use it more and more, the change in the behavior of our adolescents will be our reward.

If you are so frustrated that you do lash out, you are not alone. Groups, such as Parents Annonymous, are made up of people with similar problems. If there is a chapter in your town or city, the members will welcome your call and immediately accept you as part of their group. If there is no such group in your area, your local mental health center has counselors who can talk with you or with your whole family. The cost at these centers usually is based on what your family can afford to pay.

If you have difficulty finding help, call your child's school. Someone there will help you or at least find someone who can. There is help available.

Family councils

Family councils can be democratic discipline in action. They involve the entire family sitting down to look at concerns together and to come up with solutions and plans that are acceptable to all family members.

These councils do not ensure democracy in the home. The Higgins family holds weekly family councils where each person airs his or her grievances. Mr. and Mrs. Higgins listen carefully and attempt to make rules that are reasonable. They believe this process is democratic; however, the bottom line is that the parents draw up the rules. They are kind, and they listen, but they still hold all of the power.

In democratic homes, children share the power and have an equal part in working out limits. When conflicts arise, these family members work them through together, to everyone's mutual satisfaction. The parents are not being over-permissive, they are not handing all power to their children. Everyone is actively involved. Each person feels loved and valued. People who feel this way are ready to work together.

In a family with teenagers, it is especially valuable to have a family council, as it helps teens to affirm their independence and to contribute their ideas while, at the same time, it helps them to learn to cooperate.

In order to get your family council off to a good start, find a time for the first meeting that is good for everyone. When the family is gathered, discuss the purpose of the council and work on simple ground rules that are acceptable to everyone. These might cover how often you will meet, how long meetings will last, what topics are appropriate, what leaders you will select (usually a chairman to keep order and a secretary to record decisions), and how their terms will rotate. Even the youngest child in the family has a turn.

At first, you might deal with simple questions, such as what your family might do together to have fun. Once you're used to getting

together at regular intervals and working together as equals, you can begin to deal with the tough questions that families must face. When the going is difficult, as it sometimes is bound to be in a family council, keep in mind, always, that you are equals working together.

In families where parent-child relationships have been unfriendly, family council sessions at first may be stormy, as built-up resentments are released. As the sessions progress, and your teenagers see that their ideas and opinions are respected and that they really do have a voice, real headway can be made. As the need for rebellion and argument lessens, family harmony is more and more in evidence.

Dorothy Corkville Briggs, in Your Child's Self-esteem [4], offers an excellent discussion of democratic family councils, as does Shirley Gould, in Teenagers: The Continuing Challenge [6].

The benefits of democratic discipline and of family councils are tremendous. Through democratic discipline children:

1. feel respected and valued. Their self-esteem climbs even higher;
2. learn to resolve conflicts and solve problems in a democratic manner;
3. become involved in life, have an active part in decisions affecting them;
4. learn to plan, to make decisions, and to become responsible and self-reliant;
5. are helped to become non-aggressive leaders; and
6. show increased intellectual growth. Dorothy Corkille Briggs [4], states, "High self-esteem strongly affects whether a child uses the abilities he has."

Behavior is caused.

When a child continually misbehaves, we must find the cause and deal with it. Chronic misbehavior is a young person's way of telling us

that something is wrong in his or her life. Is there a power struggle in our family? Are our rules too strict or too lenient? Are they clear? Are there too many of them? Are we consistent? Are there medical causes? Is our adolescent's self-esteem low?

There will be times when we must keep our power and make decisions regarding our children's behavior. There will be other times when we will give the power to our adolescents to make their own decisions. In order to build high self-esteem and responsibility, there will be more times when we share our power and work out rules together than when we simply hand down the limits. How we discipline has a great effect upon how our children live their lives.

HELPING YOUR ADOLESCENT TOWARD RESPONSIBILITY

Our adolescents will not automatically become responsible when they reach the age of twenty-one. Developing responsibility and self-discipline takes many years and requires daily practice.

As parents, how can we help to foster these characteristics in our children? From the time when they are very young, we can give children a voice in what happens to them. For example, we purposely can come up with situations in which they have to make choices. Small children might select what to wear today, or which jacket out of two or three to buy, or how they want their eggs cooked for breakfast. When they're a little older, they are given more choices, and more complex ones, and they have an increasing say in what happens to them.

Together adolescents and parents can work out mutually acceptable curfews for school nights and weekends. The division of household chores, amounts for allowances, and even solutions to family disagreements.

Adolescents certainly should be contributing members of the family unit. As they mature they should be given increased responsibility for helping out at home. However, they should not be treated as family servants. They need time for homework, extracurricular activities, and free time to be alone or with friends; however, fitting one or two regular household chores, plus special, occasional jobs into their schedules shouldn't cause undue problems.

In addition to learning about what is necessary to keep a household running smoothly, children also gain the satisfaction of knowing that they are contributing to the well-being of their families.

During their junior and senior high school years, adolescents whose parents expect little of them at home tend also to have trouble accepting responsibility for their schoolwork, both homework and work done in class.

It is unreasonable to expect that young people who are used to contributing little or nothing at home will handle effectively the responsibilities of jobs or of being on their own.

With increasing age comes increasing responsibility for one's actions and increasing accountability for those actions. We can make a big difference here, also.

Fifteen-year old Beth dislikes getting up in the morning and has to be called by her mother several times before she finally drags herself out of bed at the last possible minute. She then rushes around frantically to get ready, upsets the entire family as she can't find her math book or jacket or the right shoes, and rushes out the door with a piece of cold toast in her hand, just as the bus is about to pull away. On the day when she finally misses the bus, she blames her mother! "Why didn't you get me up in time?"

The solution seems obvious. Beth now has her own alarm clock. It's her responsibility to set it, and Mother does not call her in the morning. If she misses the bus because she didn't bother to get up, Mother does not write a note to the school excusing her. Beth is responsible and is held accountable for her own actions.

If we were to sit in the main office of a junior or senior high school, we'd hear many desperate adolescents calling home. "Mom, I forgot my lunch (gym clothes, English book, book report). Can you please bring it to school?" Often, even the please is missing.

Of course, everyone forgets things occasionally and really appreciates some help; however, when this routine is repeated over and

over, we're asking for trouble. We're actually helping our children to remain at a level of irresponsibility by bailing them out when they're careless. Who is going to bail them out when they're in college, or working at their first job, and we aren't there?

Tom, aged sixteen, has passed his driving exam and has occasional use of the family car. He comes home on Saturday with a ticket for speeding. The fine is sixty dollars. Father pays it. Tom continues to drive. Then the phone call comes saying that Tom was the driver of a car involved in an accident caused by excessive speed on his part.

It isn't a sure thing, but maybe, if Tom had had to pay that fine, he'd have taken the matter more seriously.

Jean is twelve. Her parents are called by her teacher, who explains that Jean has been stealing small items from her classmates. Jean's parents become indignant, saying that she would never do that and that the teacher is mistaken. Then comes the phone call from the security person at a local department store saying that Jean has been caught shoplifting.

Again, there are no guarantees, but if her parents had faced the first problem head on, talked with Jean, and made her responsible for returning or replacing the items she had stolen from classmates, the second incident might never have occurred.

We don't want our children to be in trouble, and it's natural that we don't want to hear what is being said when they are. Our bailing them out, paying their fines, and denying what we are hearing do not help them, however.

Just as do parents, teachers encourage increasing responsibility and expect increasing accountability for actions.

For example, in the early grades, teachers remind children about work they have missed while absent from school. As they mature, and certainly by the time they reach adolescence, children are expected to go on their own to their teachers for make-up work. Teachers certainly are willing to help, and they do; however, they wisely do not take on the responsibility that belongs to the students. Also, if missed work is not made up within a reasonable period of time, some or all credit may be lost. The same holds true for daily work that is passed in late.

Teachers who expect increasing responsibility from our children deserve our thanks. The habits being instilled by them and by us may prevent flunked college courses, lost jobs, and disappointed spouses and children in our adolescents' futures.

FOSTERING A POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD SCHOOL AND LEARNING

The importance of our children's attitude toward learning cannot be overemphasized. Attitude and self-image can have a greater impact than intelligence on success in school. There are plenty of very intelligent drop-outs and failures. Clearly, a high I.Q. by itself does not guarantee success.

How can we foster a positive attitude in our children?

First, we can talk with them about school. Research shows that children who talk daily about school and school work in a positive way with their parents, actually earn higher scores on achievement tests than do children in families where such discussion does not occur. Our dinner conversations might revolve around ideas, school activities, current events, books, projects, and learning in general.

We can show our own zest for learning by reading, talking about books we've read, and being open to new ideas, especially those presented by our children. We may not agree with them, but we can be open and accept their ideas as worthy of discussion.

It is important that we provide as many rich experiences as we can for our adolescents. These might include visits to such places as museums, factories, and galleries; vacations, short and long, in various settings; support for hobbies our children select and talents (music, art, athletics, for example) they possess; inviting interesting visitors to our home; attending plays, concerts, and lectures together. The possibilities are almost endless. All of the above activities supplement what our children are learning in school and enrich their education.

We can encourage our youngsters to go to their teachers for help over the low spots. We can tell our children honestly that few things will please a teacher more than students who go in for extra help on their own. An important courtesy is to ask the teacher, "When can I see you about this?" rather than to just rush in when the teacher is working with other students.

We can support our children's school and teachers. Even if we disagree with methods used, for example, we do our youngsters no good (and possibly much harm) by putting down their teachers or the school in general. If we have real concerns, and our children can't work them out with a teacher or by talking with their guidance counselor, a parent-teacher conference might be in order. In most cases, the conference is sufficient, but if not, the next step might be to speak with the school principal. Throughout each step, we must keep in mind that our child continues to work with

this teacher on a daily basis and that the more positive we can keep that relationship, the better it is for our child.

It is important for us, as parents, to support our children in their school activities. We can attend open houses, participate in parent-teacher conferences, attend events (music, sports, debate, drama, for instance), in which our children are performing, support money-raising endeavors, and engage in volunteer work at the school.

We act as role models for our adolescents.

If we value education, probably they will too. Interest in learning is contagious. If we have it, the odds are good that our children will catch it. Clearly, our interest in our children's education makes a difference - a big difference.

HOW CAN WE HELP WITH HOMEWORK?

Our job is to let our children know, from the first grade on, that their homework is between them and their teachers. We will not become directly involved. If our youngsters fail to complete and pass in assigned work, the consequences are between them and their teachers. We will not be responsible for checking on them to see that their work is finished or done well. In other words, homework is their responsibility.

If we allow them to, children will let us take over the responsibility for their homework. They even have been known to exploit their parents. Once we take over, we may find ourselves nagging, scolding, and checking over papers. We may find, also, that we never become free of the job.

Once we begin nagging and scolding, we're becoming involved, and we're robbing our sons and daughters of their responsibility. In essence, we're saying, "I don't think you can do this on your own. You need my help."

However, our indirect help may be useful. We can provide a quiet place for our young people to study, with a desk or table, adequate lighting, reference books, i.e., a dictionary, a thesaurus, and perhaps encyclopedias, an atlas or map of the world, an assignment notebook, a ruler, scissors, and a calendar.

We might help them to figure out a good time for study that won't conflict with supper and needed leisure time.

Some children like to study where there are people nearby. This is allowable, as long as we can keep interruptions to a minimum.

Basically, our role is to stay in the background, providing encouragement rather than instruction. Occasionally, if our children ask, we may explain a sentence or check over an assignment.

A main purpose of homework is to give young people the opportunity to work on their own. This

fact, alone, should tell us that our involvement should be very slight.

WHAT IF MY CHILD IS HAVING PROBLEMS AT SCHOOL?

An important first step is to get to know your child's teachers. The best time to do that is early in the school year, before problems ever have a chance to begin. Then, if they do crop up, you and the teachers already know each other. That's a big plus.

A lot of parents are nervous about talking with their children's teachers. Often, teachers are just as nervous about talking with parents. One big reason is that often parents and teachers don't get together until after problems come up. Not having met, they aren't sure how to approach each other. Meeting early in the year can solve that problem.

Let's say that you didn't get together in the fall, and now there is a problem. It might help you to remember that teachers often are parents, too, and even they are sometimes nervous about talking to their children's teachers. Part of what makes it hard is that we really love our children, and we don't want things to go wrong in their lives. Most teachers understand this and want to help you and your children.

Another good thing to think about is that you and your child's teachers can be the best possible team to help that child. You know a lot about your child that a teacher never sees in the classroom. Teachers may be the people who know the most about how your youngster behaves when he or she is away from you -- how your child reacts to success and to failure, how he or she gets along with peers and with adults, his or her strengths and weaknesses. Together, you have a pretty complete picture of your adolescent.

Sometimes just a sharing session between you and a teacher is the key that solves your child's problem. Sometimes the solution takes more

searching. If it does, you and the teachers are the ideal people to begin that search.

At the junior and senior high school levels, it might be more convenient and helpful for you to meet with all of your child's teachers at once than to meet with each one separately. In this way, you can gain an overall view of your youngster's progress in school and can work with all of his or her teachers to provide the best possible program to fill his or her educational needs. Your child's guidance counselor or principal will be happy to arrange such a meeting.

Occasionally, when the solution isn't easy to find, or when special services might be needed, the search will lead to what is called a P.E.T. meeting. P.E.T. is short for Pupil Evaluation Team. This team exists for the sole purpose of helping children and protecting them and their parents' rights. The team usually consists of the principal or assistant principal, a learning specialist, a guidance counselor, your child's teachers, and you. Yes, you! If you would feel more comfortable, bring a friend or relative with you. All of you get together and pool the information that you think might be helpful to your child.

Sometimes, testing is the next step. If that is so, you will know about it. In fact, no test can be given without your written permission. The tests might measure your child's achievement (at what level your child is working right now); aptitude (ability to learn); specific skills, such as math or reading; developmental age (not how old your youngster is according to a birthdate, but his or her behavior age - a big difference in the two ages can cause problems); an evaluation to show emotional growth; or tests that detect vision or hearing problems. Usually, one child won't need all of these tests. At any rate, you will know which ones will be given. None of the tests are at all unpleasant, and some are even fun. Most involve answering questions, writing, solving puzzles, or doing math problems. Pretty ordinary

activities, but often they can point out a problem. If you have questions about any of the tests, someone at the school will be happy to answer them for you.

Possibly, after careful evaluation, the P.E.T. will recommend a special tutor, class, or school for your child. These are designed to fit your child's needs. Once in a while, repeating a grade or a subject is recommended.

The aim of all recommendations is to provide the opportunity for your child to experience success in school.

Help is on its way, and your cooperation has played a big part.

The goals of parents and of schools are the same--to provide all children with the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential.

How do I know when my child needs help?

In many instances, adolescents will tell you when they need help. They often know when they're in trouble. Maybe the work is too hard, or they can't see the board, or they can't hear what teachers are saying. Possibly, another student is bothering them, either at school or on the bus.

Some young people are afraid of their teachers or do not like them. Others feel that their teachers dislike them. As most teachers do like their students, most often the opposite is true. In most cases, a friendly parent-teacher talk alerts the teacher to the problem and leads to a solution.

When adolescents are failing academically over an extended period of time, or when their grades always have been fine, and there's a sudden drop, or when they seem to be trying very hard and

still are failing, it's time to check with their teachers.

Parents generally have pretty accurate feelings about when their children are having trouble. If you think that something might be wrong, don't hesitate to call the school to make an appointment to talk with your child's teachers. You have nothing to lose, and your child has everything to gain.

CAREER PLANNING

As parents, we are the greatest potential helpers for our children's career planning - if we know how to help. A major way to help is to create a positive, accepting climate at home which encourages children to explore and allows them to make free choices. Here, as in all areas of their lives, there is no substitute for high self-esteem.

The first thing we can do in helping our children to make decisions about their futures is to listen -- without criticism and without judgment, even if the ideas offered sound absurd. Parents who label their adolescents' considered career choices as outrageous or silly invite arguments and hostility, as well as teenagers who are apt to keep future ideas to themselves.

By not judging, we invite discussion of current and future ideas. Generally, teens discover by themselves which plans are unsuitable. When they do, they will abandon them much more willingly than if the plans were put down or laughed at by their parents. The key ingredient in all of our discussions with our children is mutual respect.

In order to better help our youngsters during the career - planning process, it is important for us to understand the approximate stages through which they progress.

Dean L. Hummel and Carl McDaniels, in their book, How To Help Your Child Plan a Career [7], outline three general phases of career development.

Fantasy phase, before age 11

During this phase, children believe they can do whatever they like. It is important for us to listen to their expression of dreams about who they want to become and to take part in their fantasy games involving acting out job situations.

Tentative phase, ages 11-17

In this phase, interests, abilities, and values are used in making choices. Reality isn't adequately considered, and choices are tentative. As parents, we should accept our children as growing people, regardless of strengths and weaknesses, and we should relate to jobs and to things they like to do. Substages of the tentative period are:

o Interests. Interests are now the first bases for choice, but young people begin to understand that abilities are necessary. We should provide books, magazines, and games related to our children's interests, values, and ability. We should serve as role models and introduce our children to other vocations outside our own work.

o Capabilities (about ages 13-14). After the interest, substage, young people also take their understanding of capacities into account in making plans. Their knowledge of capacities isn't total, and their choices are tentative.

o Values (about ages 15-16). Now, values begin to influence the choice process, and interests and capacities become less powerful factors.

o Transition (about ages 17-18). Factors mentioned earlier are brought together and used in choosing. There is a certain amount of hesitancy in plans, and reality factors haven't yet influenced the choice process to a great degree. However, young people usually realize that current decisions have an effect on the future. As parents, in conjunction with guidance counselors and teachers, we should help children find and use job information.

Realistic phase, 17 to young adulthood

Choices are made during this phase. Young adults now make compromises between reality factors - educational opportunities or job requirements - and personal capabilities. Reality factors are changing, and we should understand that biases against non-traditional occupations for men and women are disappearing. Substages of this period are:

o Exploration. The realistic phase begins with this; opportunities are investigated for almost the last time, and options are considered. To reinforce parental faith, we should permit our children to try out a variety of work, even if we don't like it. We can help, also, by supporting the school's efforts in career education.

o Crystallization. During this substage, the person actually takes a giant, conscious step. An important consideration is compromise.

o Specification. The choice is narrowed, the person becomes quite specific, and steps are taken to put the decision into action.

Through all stages, we offer our support and encouragement and reinforce our children's experiences in developing career plans.

Guidance and Counseling Services

Counselors in our junior and senior high schools are professionally trained people who work to help adolescents and their parents with career planning, as well as with school and personal matters.

Counselors are able to help us learn what to expect from our children, so we can plan accordingly. They can give us an overview of our children's abilities and their progress in school.

Junior high school counselors can help young people to see the connection between what they are learning and its effect on how they will earn a living later on. They can help our children and us to select appropriate courses for their freshman year in high school. Of course, junior high stu- dents are not expected to make career decisions, but a wise choice at this stage is to select the most demanding subjects in which they can do well.

Senior high school counselors have a wealth of information to share with our children and with us concerning such subjects as career choices, colleges, vocational schools, the military, tests (Scholastic Aptitude Tests and Achievement Tests, Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, for example), and financial aid. They, as well as teachers, can provide information on effective study habits and skills. Much written information is available to you and to your children through the guidance office and through your school library.

PARTING THOUGHTS

The years known as adolescence often are viewed as difficult - a time just to get through. Adolescence, however, is a very important period of growth and can be a cherished time during which we really come to know our children.

Adolescents need increasingly to be on their own but still need our support and our encouragement.

A high level of self-esteem is especially important during this time. When we accept, love, and value our adolescents, without judging them, we further strengthen the base that will allow them to complete their education and go out into society, confident and ready to succeed.

As parents, we are our children's most important teachers. They learn from the examples we set, as well as from what we say. Truly, learning is a family affair.

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